

Members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Will Cassidy, I live in Ashford and am in strong support of SB01149 AA Eliminating All Restrictions for Sunday Hunting on Public and Private Lands.

One of the chief concerns among state, national, and non-governmental organizations when looking at hunter numbers, is where the age-out of the majority of hunters will leave wildlife management and its funding. According to the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR, 2016), the largest age group participating in hunting nationally is 55-64 years old (2.7 million), second largest being 45-54 years old (2.5 million). At ages over 65 years old (1.6 million), participation decreases significantly in a manner consistent with age, i.e. decreasing physical ability plays a role. From 2011 to 2016, hunter numbers declined by 16% across the country. It is also known at the time of the report, 4.4 million hunters fell into the 18-44 age group. All of this is a great concern to wildlife managers, because without hunters, a chief tool of wildlife population control is missing, and the costs to replace hunters can be exorbitant (one need only consider New York City's roughly \$6.6M expenditure in attempting deer control on Staten Island in the absence of hunting).

The FHWAR further reports hunters' \$26.2 billion dollars of expenditure in 2016 alone, \$12.8 billion being of direct benefit to state wildlife managers through Pittman-Robertson Act excise taxation of firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. Of the 7.1 million hunters aged 18-64, it is a fact that a large majority are employed, they would have to be to spend those amounts. When looking at the demographics and factoring in employment, one point where adoption of SB01149 can be of major assistance, is that of time management. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2021 American Time Use Survey data indicates that 30.8% of single income employees work on weekends and 51.0% of multi-income employees work on weekends. Should one of those individuals also work during the week (almost a certainty with multi-income employees) it is also reasonable to expect they would take time off of work where it would have the least financial impact, which would likely be a weekend day (according to the BLS, all workers average 2-3 hours fewer at work on weekends). All of this doesn't take into account the majority of employees working Monday through Friday, nor other unavoidable demands on time stemming from family and social commitment, nor fickle weather conditions affecting outdoor activity.

Why then, one might ask, would Connecticut choose to continue restricting a group of individuals from participating in an ecologically sound recreational activity due to the day of the week? Data from BLS indicates that there is a 39% increase in recreation from weekdays to weekends. Increasing hunting opportunity would go a long way towards easing the time burden for those already engaged in the activity within the state. Further, opening Sundays to hunting will reduce a barrier to those who may otherwise be hesitant in adopting the activity due to the availability of their free time, an interest and engagement that needs to be fostered to ensure both funding and wildlife management techniques utilizing hunters continue to exist. Continuing to deny 50% of weekend

opportunity where no other “blue law” remains in the state, is contrary to logic in light of participatory concerns.

Those that speak against this measure may suggest that the flora and fauna will get no respite and public safety will be at risk. In response, one might suggest that mountain bikers, horseback riders, wildlife watchers, dog walkers, and hikers might all be required to take a day out of the woods for the sake of the ecosystem as well. The concept that those activities are less impactful to the ecosystem and individual animals outside of the hunter’s intended game is comical. It is not uncommon to see unofficial/illegal blazed trails covered in bike tread within a state forest, debris left along some hiking routes, dogs running freely through bird nesting habitat, tree limbs cut back for equestrian clearance, or dozens of individuals crowding a site to capture a photo of a rare bird. Where a person is a responsible recreationalist, their impact should not stand out nor be destructive regardless of the activity. For the game species a hunter targets, game laws are in place to ensure that the population suffers no ill effect. For those species they do not target, their impact is no different than any other user who suffers no weekend restrictions.

Game laws do not stop at the game either. Hunters in Connecticut are regulated by Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Title 26 Section 26-66-1 Behavior and Actions of Hunters. This regulation, combined with statutes and other species specific regulations, all covered within the mandated hunter education classes of the Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection, leads Connecticut to being continuously ranked one of the top five safest states to hunt in. The International Hunter Education Association’s database of 14,255 Hunter Incidents nationwide attributes twenty-four to Connecticut spanning twenty-one years, most recently eleven years ago. Seven incidents involve falls from a tree stand and three involve self inflicted injuries, i.e. the hunter was the victim in 10 out of 24 or 42% of incidents on record. Of the remaining 14, eight involved another hunter within a hunting party being the victim. Of the balance, six, all incidents were non-fatal, though the exact identity (hunter or bystander) of the victim was not reported; the characteristics of some do lead one to conclude that fewer than the six may have involved a non-hunter. Statistically, the risk to non-hunters of removing the prohibition on Sunday hunting appears non-existent. Hunters and non-hunters already interact on Saturdays, and every other day of the week, with a potential (unconfirmed) six non-fatal incidents over twenty-one years. If records were readily available, one might contrast six to the number of non-fatal incidents on the ski slopes (or any other physically involved activity) across the state over one year and consider whether the risk to bystanders was reasonable in increasing exposure to hunting an additional 52 days a year. I would submit that the risk is very reasonable.

Chiefly, for the reason of increased opportunity, but also for the lack of any threat to public safety or ecosystem health, I support passage of SB01149 out of committee. I see this as a step in bringing Connecticut in line with the rest of the nation’s hunting laws and as a message to the sportsmen and women of Connecticut, that their chosen endeavor is not second class to other forms of recreation. I hope that the Environment Committee concurs.

Thank you for your time,
Will Cassidy